

An Ecological Critique of Kalidasa's *Meghaduta*

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Abstract: Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and environment. An ecological study is deal with landscapes, plants, animals, and natural resources etc. In literary sphere, approach of ecocriticism focuses on contemporary environmental issues and its deal with human and non-human social life. This research paper is based on an environmental study in literature and reflects the consciousness of ecological aspect in the contemporary era through the analyses of Kalidasa's *Meghaduta*. Its classical lyric poetry was written in Sanskrit in ancient time. This influential work is an example of richness reflects the skillfulness and expertise of Kalidasa. It brings into focus the contribution of Kalidasa to natural environment as *Meghaduta*. This literary text is based on an environment, and every stanza is dealing with an ecological aspects. The paper tries to explore Kalidasa's concept of ecology, with emphasis on the relationship between human society and the natural world. Ecology is closely relationship with to man and nature; it is necessary part of the world. Kalidasa's *Meghaduta* is also portrays many ecological concepts such as relationship between man and nature, social and culture aspects with environment and the ancient culture with the traditional roots. Therefore, this paper attempts to examine Kalidasa's *Meghduta* from an ecological point of view.

Key words: Kalidasa, Ecocriticism, ecology, Meghaduta, nature and environment.

Ecocriticism is a literary term which talks about the physical environment in relation to literature. Ecocriticism is one of the most recently emerged interdisciplinary field of literary criticism. It refers to a study of literary texts involving the physical environment. Ecology is the science that seeks to interpret the relation of all forms of vegetation and animal life with each other. "It was the time of late 1970, when ecocriticism came into existence" (Abhrams 81). Ecocriticism is also called with different names i.e. Green study, environmental literary criticism, literary ecology and the aim of all these critical writings is the quest for the relationship between literature and physical environment. The first definition comes from the introduction to *Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), "ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (Garrard 3). Ecocriticism is a literary theory to analyses the representation of nature in the context of literary texts. It is extensively relates to create awareness of environmental degradation. Nature has created convenient consumption structure for every human and non-human society on the earth. But a human being who considers himself superior to everything consumes and exploits the living and non-living beings for the fulfillment of own desires. This ambition has made human life advanced and enriched.

Ecocriticism has very deep roots and with itself includes everything related to the naturally resources for example mountain, sky, earth, sea, water and forest etc. All the non-human elements i.e. buildings, houses, rocks, soil, agriculture, caves, hills, plants, trees, oceans, seasons, birds, animals, wind, ancient architecture, flora and fauna etc, are considered a beautiful gallery of portraits in ecocriticism. Ecocriticism expands its critical approaches which differ from other literary theories. Most literary theories evaluate the relationship between writers, texts, and the world. All the other theories considered the world as only society or the social sphere. But ecocriticism takes it in the entire context of ecosphere which includes all human and non-human worlds.

Eco-consciousness and deep concerns for ecology can be seen in its full range of spectrum and in the origin and growth of our culture and civilization. All the religious texts like *Bible*, the *Quran*, and the Hindu religious scriptures, *Vedic literature*, the *Geeta*, the *Bhagvad Mahapurans*, the *Ramayana* and *Upnishads* are also emphasise upon ecocritical study (Jana and Rajakrishnan

V. 5). Kalidasa, a well-known great poet in ancient Sanskrit literature, conveys the human relationship in this way: “Hail, friend of Indra, counselor divine/ Illustrious offspring of a glorious line/ Wearer of shapes at will, thy worth I know/ And bold entrust thee with my fated woe/ For, better far, solicitation fail/ With high desert, than with the base prevail” (Wilson 6-8).

Kalidasa is acknowledged to be the major poet in the Sanskrit literature. His works testify his vast knowledge of *Vedas*, *Puranas*, *Upanishads*, Philosophy, Kama Sastra, Ayurveda, Astronomy and several theatrical treatises. Bana Bhatta says, “निर्गतासु न वा कस्य कालिदासस्य सूक्तिषु/ प्रीति र्मधुरसान्द्रासु मंजरीषिवव जायते” ॥ (When Kalidasa’s sweet sayings charming with sweet sentiment, went forth who did not feel delight in them as in honey-laden flowers of mango tree) (Shastri 28). Kalidasa is unquestionably the greatest mastermind in Sanskrit poetry and all of his literary works are based on naturally beauty and religious scriptures. *Meghaduta* is most prominent work in all his literary works, because he has described natural beauty, love and nature description, cloud, flowers, trees, mountains, rivers, mythological palaces and geographical- description. Thus, these components of ecocritical theory which are showing in *Meghaduta* text.

A short poem (*Meghaduta*) of 122 stanzas, it is one of Kalidasa’s most famous literary work. It is divided into two parts, *Purvamegha* (previous cloud) and *Uttaramegha* (consequent cloud). This lyric poetry shows how Yaksha feels after having been exiled from Alaka. Suffering the agony of separation, Yaksha, the lover, becomes completely love ridden and takes the help of a cloud, the *Megha*, address to his love message to his beloved. The graphical descriptions of nature and topographical details of ancient India have been shown in the lyric by Kalidasa. There is lots of poetry which deal with the environmental theme and important lyrics Kalidasa’s *Meghaduta* is entrenched with the environmental theme from the beginning to the end. Literature can play an important role to ameliorate the environmental crisis. It can convey a message to human beings that living with nature and extracting limited resources is the only source to live in harmony. Nature has been the theme of earlier writings, but serious concern of ecology seems to be lacking in the earlier works. There are lots of ecocritical concerns in the midst of this poetry. The study of *Meghaduta* from an ecocritical perspective begins with the depiction of landscape. Kalidasa’s *Meghaduta* has defined the path of cloud from Ramagiri to Alaka city through Yaksha’s instruction to cloud. This lovely journey is representing of nature, as Himalaya, Rajhansh, Kailash Mountain, bird, animals, flowers, trees, lakes, forests, rivers, stars, moon, sun, clouds etc. These elements are represents to beauty of nature and physical environment. This cloud journey is

representing to environment from sky to earth. Primarily, ecocriticism involves the phenomena of natural environment; it includes cloud, plants, trees, forests, lakes, ponds, streams, rivers and landscapes etc. The word cloud includes nature in general and also a number of event or spiritualism that are the parts of ecology. The thought of Poet describes as the main character 'Cloud' represents a long journey from lover to beloved. Poet has given different names of cloud as messenger, character, sky, water wind and nature. The Cloud Journey of Ramagiri to Alkapuri is representing to relationship between men and nature. For example of the emphasis on the interconnectedness of human being and Nature is Kalidasa's *Meghaduta*:

Eastward, where various gems, with blending ray,
In Indra's bow o'er yonder hillock play,
And on thy shadowy form such radiance shed,
As peacock's plumes around a krishna spread,
Direct thy course: to Malas smiling ground,
Where fragment tillage breathes the fields around;
Thy fertile gifts, which looks of love reward,
Where bright-eyed peasants tread the verdant sward (Wilson 15-16)

The similar idea is beautifully and effectively expressed in these lines:

Lo! Where awhile the Swans reluctant cower,
Dasarna's fields await the coming shower.
Then shall their groves diffuse profounder gloom,
And brighter buds the deepening shade illumine;
Then shall the ancient tree, whose branches wear
The marks of village reverence and care,
Shake through each leaf, as birds profanely wrest
The reverend boughs to form the rising nest (Wilson 30)

These lines are deal with Kalidasa's ecological position as a poet of Nature and awareness of physical world. Kalidasa symbolically interlinks the non-human world with human world. The aforesaid lines are expression of flowers and tress through the ecological way. "When you will be in the vicinity, the Dasarna country will have the hedges of its gardens white-coloured with the *Ketaka* flowers opened at their apexes, the sacred trees of its villages will be greatly disturbed by the nest-making of the domestic birds, its skirts of *Jambu* forests dark with their ripe fruit, and the

swans halting there for same days” (Kale 46). The complete existence of human being lies on the environment. The creation of human being has been a long term evolution process in which ecology plays as the important feature. Man is different from other species because of his literacy. As Joseph Meeker state through man lacks the “plant’s talents for photosynthesis and is unable to fly like birds, yet with his superior brain he is able to produce great poems and mediocre office memos” (3).

Ecology is not only connected but also studies between environment and human being. On the basis of ecological theory we can define the various part of nature has shown in the kalidasa’s *Meghaduta*. This reflects the important role of ecological perspective. Kalidasa has used beautiful imagery in his poetry from ecological perspective and effect on human society. *Meghaduta* every stanza represents the men and nature relationship with the Yaksha’s instruction to cloud. Eco criticism study is relation between nature and human being. “This unusual combination of the physical and the spiritual can be seen in some of the terms used in ecology and ecocriticism both of which have the same aim. As a pedagogical practice, ecocriticism explores language as a co-evolutionary process of the earth. It articulates the symbiotic relationship between land and landscape, text and terrain, and recognizes that language is not separate from the world of nature” (Hari Padma Rani 29). The relationship between man and nature can be defined as interdependent. Our irresponsible actions cause an irreparable damage to nature. In this way the chain of ecosystem works in which everything is related to each other and shows its effect on one another. Kale has define into English language *Meghaduta*, translated text has also represent as a relationship between nature and human being, “It has also a pond attached to it, furnished with a flight of steps formed of emerald stones, and closely filled with full-blown golden lotuses with glistening stalks of vaiduryas, the swans dwelling in the water of which, being free from anxiety, do not long for (the lake) Manasa, through close at hand, even on seeing you (at the approach of the rainy season)” (129). Ecocriticism is the theory of literature and environment, its deal between human and non-human society. This theory is based on environment issue to create an awareness regarding the nature’s destruction through the analysis of literary works.

Eco criticism study is based on environment science, but in contemporary society this approach has been changed. This literary theory not only represent to social life but also to non human society. Ecology is a part of main stream of human society. Kalidasa’s *Meghaduta* is represent to social phenomena from ecocritical point of view. In the first part of *Meghaduta*, poet

has defined Yaksha is misses his beloved (Yakshini), and sees in the expression of her beauty in the nature and sharing her feeling in explain the verse:

नीचैराख्यं गिरिमधिवसेस्तत्र विश्रांतिहेतो-

सत्वत्संपर्कात्तपुलकितमिव प्रौढपुष्पैः कदम्बैः ।

यः पण्यस्त्रीरतिपरमिलोदारिभि नारगराणा-

मुद्गामानि प्रथयति शिलावेश्मभि यौरवनानि ॥ (Purvamegha 26) (Sharma 43)

(In order to take rest there, thou wilt stay on the mountain called Nihaih bristling, as it were, as thy touch with the Kadamba trees having full-blown flowers; (the mountain) which, by means of its stony houses redolent of the perfume used by harlots when sporting, discloses the licentious youth of the townsmen (Pathak 23). According to Mita, “The reference of Nicha Mountain signifies the throbbing youth. The mountain is the treasure of stone – caves emitting the smell of perfume used in their sports by harlots, proclaims the unrestrained youth of Vidisha. The care to give shade to female who plucks flowers, shows cloud’s helping nature to benefit others which is part of society” (2). “On reaching the country of Avanti, the old villager sin which are conversant with the stories about Udayana, repair to the city of Vishala, great by its opulence already mentioned to you-the city which is as it were a bright part of heaven brought brown down (to the earth) by the remaining merit of those, who, after having lived in heaven, have come down to the earth, (the stock of) the fruits of their virtuous deeds having run short” (Kale 56). The element of Custom, moral, law, religion soul, god etc. are well showing here which are the important aspect of human society that affected by nature. Thus, we can say that Kalidasa’s *Meghaduta* is indicated to all the aspects of human and social ecology. Ecocriticism has given increased attention to literary representatives of environment and awareness. This approach shifts critical focus from social relations to natural relation and views the individual as a member of ecological system. This study has been a delightful aesthetic experience which has enhanced the knowledge in newly developed field of ecocriticism. The striking presence of coconsciousness makes the poetry ecocritical valuable.

The important aspect of ecocritical in Kalidasa’s Cloud Messenger is represent to naturally culture which are glory Kailasha and Rajhansa Mountains, beauty of river, green grass etc. As we say that every stanza of *Meghaduta* is represent to different culture of naturally beauty from Ramagiri to Alka city. “The artistic Alaka city young women are represent to flowery decoration to their parts of body, flowery trees with humming of bees, lakes with blooming lotuses give

pleasurable atmosphere with unique culture of Alaka to readers” (Mita 2). “Where the young women have a sportive lotus in their hands, interweave their hair with the fresh-blown *Kunda* blossoms, have the beauty of face rendered yellowish-white with the pollen of *Lodhra* flowers and wear the fresh *Kurabaka* flowers in their braids the lovely *Sirish* flowers on their ears and the *Nipa* flowers, that spring up into existence at your approach, on the line of the parting of their hair” (Kale 111). Every things of Alaka city women custom, ritual, tradition, belief etc. are represent to naturally culture. The natural beauty of flowers like Kunda, Shirisha, Kadamba, Nima, Kutaja, Ketka, etc., trees like Bakul, Mandar, Ashoka, Kalpavruksha, Devadar Mandar, in Alka city show the facets of nature. The historical places like Avanti, Vidisha, Dashpura, Devgiri, Ramagiri, Ujjayani, Kurukhetra, Kanakhala Alka etc., the reference of rivers like Reva, Jahavahi, Ganga, Gambhira, Sindhu, Yamuna, Vetravati, Saraswati, Shipra, Charmanvati etc., and the great mountains like Himalaya, Kailash, Amarakuta, Vindhya, Nicha enhance the quality of poetry with representation of Green studies (ecocriticism). Kalidasa’s *Meghaduta* is portray of different mythological and historical character’s God, Goddess, girls, female plucking flowers, etc. from human society. Thus, *Meghaduta* distinguish culture arise from nature, both nature and culture are deeply connected which is the element of environment approach.

In reading the *Meghaduta* through the ecocritical perspective, the study has presented a new interpretation of how the landscape, non-human world are used to shape the stories of the poetry. This lyric represents multidimensional impacts of the river. The first is the realistic portrayal of the landscape such as rivers and the two cities. This poetry focused on sacred ancient Indian mythology.

See where the clustering Madhavi entwines,
And bright Kuruvaka the wreath confines;
Profuse, Ashoka sheds its radiant flower,
And budding Kesara adorns the bower:
These are my rivals; for the one would greet,
As I would willingly, my charmer's feet;
And, with my fondness, would the other sip
The grateful nectar of her honeyed lip (Wilson 72-73)

Sudden, Himalayan breezes split open
The tightly-shut leaf-buds on deodars,
And redolent of their oozing resin
Blow south; I embrace those breezes
Fondly imagining they have of late
Touched your limbs, O perfect one! (Rajan 319)

These opening poetry lines are based on spiritual and mental distance between human beings and their environment, which are showing ecological point of views. Kalidasa compares to sufferings of Yaksha's wife with *Kamalnaal* and present the ecological dimensions. "Those breezes from the mountain of snow (Himalaya) which, at once breaking open the folds of the shoots of the Devadaru trees and fragrant with their milky exudations, blow in a southerly direction, are embraced by me, O, meritorious one, with the thought that they might have in all probability touched your body previously" (Kale 171). C. B. and Ouvry argue that, "All the flowers with which the Yakshinis are adorned have a special season for into blossom. Nipas blossom in the Rains, the Kunda, or Jasmin, in the Autumn, the Lodhra in the winter, the Kuravaka in Spring, the Serisha in Summer. It is to be observed that Kalidasa here shows that all these flowers blossomed continually together at Alaka" (42). All these aspects are favoured by ecology. Ecology adopts a philosophical/metaphysical approach in the study of the relationship between organism and the environment (Selvamony, Nirmaladasan, and Alex xi). It comes from two Greek words *oikos* and *logos* which means *household*. (It is a united relationship of culture, nature, humans and the sacred.) It deals with the living organism and physical environment. The term ecology plays an important role in present age. It is the study of interrelationship of living things and their surroundings. The inter-relationship between naturally environment and living organisms is beautifully description by Kalidasa in *Meghaduta*. "The description of nature at the outset of the rainy season by Kalidasa informs his extra-ordinary powers of observation. Kalidasa is looking for the green life energy and pleasure in the conditions of nature that occurs during the climate change of season. Each living-being is related to another and the action of one is responsible for the reaction of another" (Suprabha C T 129). Thus, Kalidasa has described the different parts of nature beauty, which is the main part of ecological system.

The writing of Kalidasa expressed the basic idea of human culture which is interconnected to physical world. The natural world is affecting to both human and non-human and also affected by both of these. Kalidasa stress on environmental justice to a large extent. The logic of domination is implicit in discrimination and oppression on grounds of class as well as species and gender. The Poet makes us aware of the necessities of forests for the development of the human society in terms of the social, historical, economic and cultural. Eco criticism is an authentic or unique and recent developing literary theory. Thus, ecocriticism becomes a literary and critical tool. "Ecocriticism, ultimately a form of environment advocacy, is primarily a critical and literary tool, a kind of reading designed to expose and facilitate analysis of a text's orientation both to the world in which it takes shape, along with the conditions and context that affect that orientation, whatever it might be". (Sumathy 4). The protection of the environment is very important for our human and non-human society. As we can say that environment is a part of our life, we can't live without healthy environment. Indian Ancient Poet Kalidasa has defined to important of environment for human being. Now days literary and non-literary writers are also give to message about to save environment for our spiritual and materialist world.

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